



Washington State Department of Agriculture

News Release

For immediate release: Jan. 9, 2004 (04-01)

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Farm-to-cafeteria connections

Handbook tells how to get locally grown foods into institutional cafeterias

OLYMPIA – A new handbook published by the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is available to help farmers, food service professionals, and communities bring locally grown foods into schools, nursing homes, hospitals and other institutions. The 87-page handbook, *Farm-to-Cafeteria Connections: Marketing Opportunities for Small Farms in Washington State*, explains how to start a farm-to-cafeteria program and includes numerous resources and case studies of successful projects.

“Farm-to-cafeteria projects improve the quality of food served in institutions and increase community access to fresh, local foods through school lunch programs and other cafeterias by building connections between farmers and food service buyers,” says Kelli Sanger, coordinator of WSDA’s Small Farm and Direct Marketing Program.

WSDA works with small farms, farmers markets, institutional food services, chefs and non-profit organizations to connect consumers directly to farmers who sell fresh, local products.

“We’re working with public and private organizations to increase the economic viability of small farms and strengthen Washington's local food systems,” Sanger said.

Sanger developed the handbook and is conducting a series of forums for farmers and food service representatives to learn the benefits of serving locally produced foods in cafeterias. The first forum in October in Spokane featured success stories from farmers and institutions that have already set up farm-to-cafeteria programs. A second regional workshop is slated for Feb. 19 in Bellingham.

Funding for the handbook and workshops is provided through a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Risk Management Agency.

“Farm-to-cafeteria programs take many approaches, depending on the individuals who create them,” says Sanger. “They can showcase fresh apples and salad greens in a daily salad bar or highlight Washington-grown food at a one-time harvest meal or special event.”

Lincoln Elementary School, Olympia

For example, at Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia, a parent proposed the idea of an Organic Choices Program for school lunches, featuring a salad bar with fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads and protein such as

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eggs, beans and cottage cheese. The program increased fruit and vegetable servings taken by students and staff by 27 percent. It has been adopted by 11 elementary schools in the Olympia School District and received national recognition in October from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Educating students about food sources

Farm-to-cafeteria programs provide local markets for farms and often integrate education about local food and farming issues with the food served in the cafeteria. They may distinguish locally grown foods in the cafeteria, or involve special events with local farm organizations, create nutrition curriculum around school gardens, and provide opportunities for field trips to local farms.

The handbook is available for free by contacting Sanger at (360) 902-2057, or e-mail at ksanger@agr.wa.gov or by downloading it from the WSDA Web site at <http://agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm/default.htm>.

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